

2005 Hunting Conditions at Medicine Lake NWR

August 24, 2005

The Medicine Lake National Wildlife Refuge and the Northeast Montana Wetland Management District open to upland game bird hunting on Sept. 1. The youth waterfowl season will be September 24-25, and general waterfowl hunting opens on October 1. Ring-necked pheasant season opens on Oct. 8 and continues through January 1, 2006 for both residents and non-residents. Big game archery season runs September 3 - October 16 and rifle season runs October 23 – November 27. See Refuge Hunting Map at <http://medicinelake.fws.gov/hunting> for areas open to hunting. Nontoxic shot is required for all shotgun hunting on U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service lands, including the Medicine Lake Refuge and all Waterfowl Production Areas. Refuge hunting follows State of Montana seasons and regulations found at <http://fwp.state.mt.us> and no additional special permits or licenses are required to hunt the Refuge. Hunting Areas #1 and #3 open for upland game bird and deer hunting beginning November 15 and will remain open for the remainder of the appropriate hunting season. See Refuge Hunting Map and Regulations at <http://medicinelake.fws.gov/hunting> for further information.

Regional Conditions

The winter of 2004-2005 was fairly mild in northeast Montana and upland bird survival was fairly good. Deer also fared well and counts place the population numbers near the 15 year average.

Refuge Conditions

Pheasants: Refuge pheasant numbers are recovering and appear to be near average. Breeding season conditions were fair to good and broods are being spotted regularly. Hunting opportunities will probably be good but some areas have not recovered completely from the winter of 2003-2004.

Sharp-tailed grouse: Lek counts were good this year but few sightings of broods are being reported. Population numbers are estimated to be near the ten year average.

Partridge: Numbers are on the increase but are still well below the long term average.

Waterfowl: A wet spring and early summer helped replenish wetland basins in the area. Refuge water units were refilled and as a result of good wetland conditions, duck production in northeast Montana was good this year. The USFWS North American fall flight forecast of 31.7 million birds is nearly the same as last year's estimate, but 5% below the 1955-2003 long term average. Hunting opportunities should still be quite good on the Refuge and Waterfowl Production Areas. For more waterfowl information check out the following sites: <http://www.fws.gov> & <http://www.ducks.org>

Big game: Whitetail deer numbers have recovered from the late 90's and this winter's doe/fawn counts were only slightly below the fifteen year average. Mule deer and pronghorn numbers remain low because the Refuge is not in the preferred habitat for these two species.

Free Sandhill Crane permits for the Central Flyway of Montana are available at the Refuge headquarters on a first-come/first-served basis. The permit is also available at Bowdoin National Wildlife Refuge (<http://bowdoin.fws.gov/>), Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks regional offices in Glasgow, Billings, Miles City, and the state office in Helena(<http://fwp.state.mt.us/>).

Swan permits are only available from Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks. Please contact them at (406)228-3700 for more information.